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ABSTRACT

The resources of thousands of books and pamphlets are housed in countless libraries throughout the United States; librarians codify, classify, and circulate these materials in ways that are often mysterious to library users. There are many ways to reduce this element of mystery: effective service at the reference desk; prominent signs and directions; printed materials to assist the user in finding what he wants as effortlessly as possible. It is to this last category that these guidelines are addressed: the preparation of printed materials to convey to the library user the scope, resources, and services of the library itself. Whether large or small, most libraries will have need of one basic publication, the library handbook, which details for the user the essential information about the library and its collections and services. Specifically these guidelines for preparing a library handbook contain: information to be included, order of presentation, style of writing, format and design, and a list of supplementary reading. (Author/NH)

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Guidelines for Library Handbooks

Federal Library Committee Task Force on Public Relations

Federal Library Committee Washington 1972

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FOREWORD

Plain Words About Library Handbooks

In his sprightly introduction to *The Complete Plain Words*, certainly one of the world's brightest manuals on how to transfer ideas into language, Sir Ernest Gowers makes this point:

> The scope of this book is circumscribed by its being intended primarily for those who use words as tools of their trade, in administration or business.

The authors of these guidelines have a double reason for appreciating this statement: first, libraries are the very essence of words used as tools or instruments of information; and secondly, librarians themselves are compelled to use words to explain the nature of their service or enterprise.

These guidelines then are intended to assist librarians in helping others to use words well. The resources of thousands of books and pamphlets are housed in countless libraries throughout the United States; librarians codify, classify, and circulate these materials in ways that are often mysterious to library users. There are many ways to reduce this element of mystery: effective service at a reference desk; prominent signs and directions; printed materials to assist the user in finding what he wants as effortlessly as possible.

It is to this last category that these guidelines are addressed: the preparation of printed materials to convey to the library user the scope, resources, and services of the library itself. There is a wide range of such materials: some institutions may well utilize handsomely illustrated brochures to share with their readers the significant items in the collection while others may employ simple handouts to inform their users about hours of opening or recent purchases of importance.

Whether large or small, however, most libraries will have need of one basic publication, the library handbook, which details for the user the essential information about the library and its collections and services. Advocates of the principle that every library should be able to provide a statement of its purpose and a description of its services, the authors of these guidelines are nonetheless insistent that no handbook should ever be regarded as a substitute for the personal interchange that must exist between the seeker and the finder, the researcher and the librarian.

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CONTENT

INFORMATION TO BE INCLUDED: Although the audience and purpose of a guide will affect its content, certain kinds of information are nearly always included. These can be divided into two categories:

Essentials

- Full identification of the agency and the library
- Location
  - within a building
  - street address, city
  - any special directions needed by prospective users
- Days and hours of service
- Mission of the library
- Services provided
  - loan, interlibrary loan
  - reference, research, compilation of bibliographies
  - reproduction
- Regulations regarding use, including eligibility (explicit mention of requirements for establishing identification)
- Description of major holdings
- Means of reaching library staff
  - telephone numbers (only if service policy encourages telephone access)
  - names and titles of key staff members (Include names if turnover is infrequent or revision will be easy and inexpensive.)
- Methods of access to collections
  - catalogs
  - indexes
  - staff assistance (Emphasize the role of the librarian in a way that encourages the user to seek his help.)
- Date of handbook's publication (If frequent revision is not expected this may be coded as its usefulness will be primarily internal.)

Useful Under Certain Conditions

- List of reference books
- List of periodicals
- Information about other related information and research sources
- Floor plans or other simple directions to guide the user to the information he desires. (Frequent rearrangements or a complex layout may make posting of floor plans at key locations preferable to their inclusion in a handbook. In small libraries where the arrangement is clearly and immediately visible they should not be needed at all. If used, they need not include every detail. Only primary areas of potential interest to the user and means of access to those areas, such as stairways, should be presented.)
- Table of contents and index (need is determined by size and complexity of handbook)
- History of the library
- Treasures; special collections and related services
- Architectural features of the library

ORDER OF PRESENTATION: After the specific information to be included has been determined, several considerations affect the sequence in which it should be presented:

- The most basic information (identification, location, etc.) must be given greatest prominence (on a cover or at the beginning).
- Information to be referred to again and again (hours, telephone numbers, etc.) should be placed so as to facilitate access (at the very beginning, the very end, or possibly on a cover or insert).
- The library user is not likely to read the handbook through from cover to cover. The earlier information is presented, the more likely he is to absorb it. Generally speaking, the bulk of descriptive information should be arranged in order of decreasing importance *to the user.*
- Information should be presented in a logical manner, with related items grouped together.

STYLE OF WRITING

- The *narrative* should be as brief and concise as possible; unnecessary wordage should be eliminated. There can be a danger in providing too much information. The potential user may be so deterred by the size and detail that he does not read the handbook at all. Good grammar is basic.
- *Terminology* known only to librarians should be eliminated wherever possible. If you must use a phrase such as "classification scheme," explain its significance *from the reader's point of view.*
- The *tone* should be positive. It may be personal, but it should never be cute or coy. It should invite interest in reading the handbook and using the library.
- *Headings* are of extreme importance, especially when a handbook is too brief to require an index. The selection of a heading should be made with the reader's interests always in mind. Although "Circulation" and "Interlibrary Loan" may be separate operations of major significance to the librarian, they probably have little meaning for the reader. He is interested in "How To Obtain a Book" or better yet, "Books: How To Obtain Them." Headings should be written to facilitate scanning. The reader should be able to tell entirely from a heading whether he needs to read the material below it to obtain the information he requires.
- The value of an *Index* depends on the size and complexity of the book's contents. It may be unnecessary and undesirable if the handbook is brief, and the subject headings are well chosen and clearly visible. If an index is included, it should be a professional job with meaningful entries. In an alphabetical index such terms as these are useless: "Limited Service," "How To Find a Book," "Author Card."

FORMAT AND DESIGN

A handbook is designed to inform the prospective user of the services that the library offers him, to provide a permanent reference guide to essential information about the library, and to invite use of the library as well as interest in it and support of its programs. Therefore, the handbook should be:

- Attractive in appearance
- Easy to understand
- Handy to use
- Easy to obtain
- Designed for retention
- Economical to revise

The concept of the product should be compatible with the capabilities of the producer. The talent, skill, financial resources, and equipment available to the library will all have an influence on the quality of the design and illustration and on the production, i.e. composition, printing, and binding. Agency regulations may affect all of these. Expense does not necessarily add to either the attractiveness or the usefulness of a work. A well-conceived, well-designed guide, simply produced, may serve its purpose as well as or better than a lavish one.

If there is professional design and production assistance available within the agency, it should be utilized to the fullest extent possible. However, the librarian producing a handbook, whether or not he has access to professional designers, has a better chance of success if he can judge among proposed solutions. Several good books on the subject exist, and a list is appended for those who wish detailed guidance. A librarian can further develop his awareness by examining publications he particularly admires with respect to such matters as choice of paper, type, placement, size, and illustrations.

Specific solutions will vary, depending upon the needs of the library and the resources available. But certain conscious choices must be made in the design of any handbook and in every case the following elements must be considered:

PAGE SIZE: This is closely tied to the principal purpose to be served. If the handbook is for constant reference and should be carried at all times, it must be small enough to be easily accommodated in a pocket or purse. If it is to be incorporated in an agency manual of operations it must conform to the size and style of that manual.

NUMBER OF PAGES: This will depend on the length of the manuscript, on the page size and type size desired, and on the financial resources at your disposal. If you can convey as much information as necessary in 4 pages, a simple, inexpensive folded sheet, printed on both sides but requiring no binding, may be your solution. If your manuscript requires more than 4 pages, the realities of printing and folding often demand that you think in terms of 8, 16, 32, or 48 pages. It is well to keep these alternatives in mind when writing the handbook. If you find that you have extra space, do not pad the text. Such space can be used for lists, charts, illustrations, or more effective placement of the text.

TYPE: The range of typefaces available today is vast. The typeface gives character to the page and its selection should be given careful consideration. Type must always be large enough for ease of reading; print that is too small can discourage the reader altogether as can too long a type line. If at all possible, get professional help to arrive at the optimum relations of type, margins, and line spacing.

If you use an ordinary typewriter, you will have only caps, lower case, and underlining at your disposal to differentiate headings, titles, etc. However, careful placement on the page can often compensate for this limited range. Certain typewriters allow a selection of typefaces. Office composing machines and traditional printing methods offer a variety of typefaces and sizes, boldface, and often a related italic face. Unless you have a highly talented professional designer at your disposal, it is wise to avoid mixing different type faces; their designs are often incompatible, and mixing results in a cluttered appearance.

The character of your text will affect your typographic requirements to a great degree. If you have many headings and subheadings, you may need great flexibility in type sizes and faces. If your text is relatively simple, good design and placement of typewritten copy may serve as well. The advantages and costs of various methods should be weighed in relation to your needs and resources. Familiarity with the potentialities of the equipment available to you is recommended. Watch for attractive publications that appear within your agency and trace them to their origins. The equipment on which they were produced may be available to you.

ILLUSTRATIONS: Illustrations, whether drawings or photographs, are not essential, although they may provide a pleasing break in copy. If they are used they should:

- Add to, not detract from, the guide's attractiveness and usefulness
- Serve a purpose
- Conform to the limitations of the printing process
- Be of high quality
- Be well produced

An elaborate printing process is no longer required to obtain good results but professional guidance should be sought in the planning stages.

PLACEMENT: The placement of text and illustrations affects both the attractiveness of a page and its ability to communicate at a glance. Related passages of text should be grouped together and clearly separated by plenty of white space from unrelated material. Too much meaningless white space, as in consistent use of double spacing on a typewriter, can lead to confusion, especially if one is trying to scan a page. White space should be used in a sensitive fashion to indicate a change of subject. Margins should be ample.

Indentions can be used, as in an outline, to indicate subordinate relationships but their use must be consistent throughout and one must be careful not to carry over subordinate material to another page so that it becomes visually dissociated from its main heading. Illustrative material should be placed in immediate proximity to the point it is intended to clarify.

PAPER: The appropriate paper will vary greatly depending upon circumstances. It is wise to be advised by your printer as to what will meet your needs. In selecting a color, keep in mind that it is difficult to read type printed on a dark surface. The tradition of black type on a light page has survived for a reason: legibility. Remember, too, that paper has a grain which must be taken into account in folding.

COLOR: Tasteful selection of color in both paper and ink is essential. A two-color printing job, although involving additional expense in the second run through the press, can lend emphasis and liveliness to the simplest page. If a second color is used, it should be applied for a clear purpose in relation to the text.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Many paper and type houses issue helpful handbooks on planning and producing printed materials. Frequently, agencies for in-house printing equipment offer guides on preparing copy for various methods of production. Check with local suppliers.

Among the many good books on the subject, the compilers have found the following titles useful:

Arnold, Edmund C. Ink on paper: a handbook of the graphic arts. New York and Evanston, Harper & Row, 1963.

Like *Bookmaking* listed below, this handbook tells more than most librarians want to know about the graphic arts. Its clearly written approach to the basic elements that go into the production of a printed piece, however, combined with glossary and illustrations, make it a valuable guide.

Lee, Marshall. Bookmaking: the illustrated guide to design and production. New York, R. R. Bowker, 1965.

Although this book treats of printing and production at the professional level, it is of value to the layman for its definitions of terms and basic information on composition, design, layout, preparation of materials for the printer, etc. The text is well illustrated with examples and diagrams.

Melcher, Daniel and Nancy Larrick. Printing and promotion handbook. 3d edition. New York, McGraw Hill, 1966.

An encyclopedia from A to Z written for those who have to buy printing or who must plan and prepare printing. Not for the printer or specialist, it gives specific facts and practical details. A valuable feature for the layman is the information on where to buy materials or services.

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